

# MANUFACTURING EXTENSION PARTNERSHIP

## Success Stories from the Field

### Sparks Belting Co.

#### Michigan Manufacturing Technology Center

#### Sparks Belting Improves Workflow, Saves Costs with Kaizen

##### Client Profile:

Founded in 1946 and headquartered in Grand Rapids, Michigan, Sparks Belting Company is an internationally recognized manufacturer, fabricator, and distributor of customized conveyor belting, motorized pulleys, and powered rollers. Part of the JSJ family of companies, Sparks Belting serves OEMs and end-users in a variety of industries through seven U.S. manufacturing facilities and two facilities in Mexico. Sparks Belting has under 80 employees.

##### Situation:

Faced with processing 40 to 60 daily shipments, ranging in size from one-pound packages to 6,000-pound truck shipments transported by multiple carriers and comprising various types of product, Sparks Belting needed to establish a systemic process for efficiently processing, shipping, and tracking customer requests. The company turned to the Michigan Manufacturing Technology Center (MMTC), a NIST MEP network affiliate, for assistance.

##### Solution:

MMTC and The Right Place, Inc., paired Sparks Belting with a local consultant experienced in lean tools and techniques who guided the company through a Kaizen event, a popular lean manufacturing technique used to achieve dramatic improvements in a short time. "Much of the effort during the intensive, three-day event focused on re-organizing the physical layout of the shipping/receiving department," explained Todd Ritsema, Sparks Belting key account systems and process manager. "Eighty percent of the work accomplished in that 3,000 square-foot room was done in 300 square feet of space," he said. The balance of the space was occupied with product overflow, excess packaging material, and other items. In addition, the company experienced substantial peaks and valleys in productivity measured by bookings per hour; an average of 17 orders were in Raw/WIP staging area during regular samples at 9:00, 12:00 and 3:00; It took an average of 8.5 minutes to process a UPS order; and most orders were being dropped off by production versus being 'pulled' into shipping by shipping personnel. "There was a lot of batching of product, which caused a spike in our shipping volume at the end of the day," added Ritsema.

To level the flow of product through the department, the Sparks Belting team documented the shipping/receiving process, cleaned and organized the department, created dedicated shipping and receiving areas for products, and established regular 'milk runs' for shipping personnel to pick up products from the shop floor. As a result, the company has reduced work in process by 33 percent, decreased the in-house travel distance to ship product from 4,950 feet to 300 feet, and eliminated the equivalent of one full time position from the department. "Those three people are still with the company, but they now take turns rotating out of the area and into production," Ritsema said. "We've been able to increase our production team by the equivalent of one person without having to hire another employee." Other successes included the increased flexibility, reduction of raw material, identifying how the main cause of process interruptions (Credit Hold) is impacting the company, and

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the creation of Standard Work and Visual Systems to ensure better flow and flexibility. The next challenge is the scheduling department.

### Results:

- \* Reduced work in process by 33 percent.
- \* Reduced travel distance by 93 percent, from 4,950 feet to 300 feet.
- \* Reduced raw material.
- \* Created Standard Work and Visual Systems to manage flow.
- \* Leveled product flow.

### Testimonial:

"The people on the shipping kaizen team initially were hesitant due to the layout overhaul and changes in the way they work, but now they really like the area. We did an internal company tour, and the shipping kaizen team was really attached to their accomplishment. Now others are getting the idea that, yes, we can make a change and we can sustain it."

Todd Ritsema, Materials Manager